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AUTHOR Olszewski, William; Bussler, Darrol
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ABSTRACT

This paper defines service-learning as an individual or group act of good will for a person, group, or community, based on planned educational outcomes. Philosophically, ideas of service-learning emerged in the Progressive Education Movement and later in the philosophy of reconstructionism. A university goal should be development of students' sense both of social responsibility and of what is learned by contributing to society. To attain this goal, the university needs to provide access and motivation. In a legitimate service-learning project, there will be ample opportunity for decision making and problem solving, as well as interpersonal skill building, critical thinking, cooperation, and identification of priorities and values. Serious commitment to service-learning demands that it be regarded not as an add-on course, but as an integral part of institutional thinking. The College of Education at Mankato (Minnesota) State University is developing service-learning in its curriculum. The program will grant four credits to students who serve 40 to 50 hours in an area community agency, attend a weekly class, make site visits to communities practicing service-learning in their schools, and develop recommendations regarding integration of service-learning into teacher preparation. (JDD)

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# LEARNING TO SERVE--SERVING TO LEARN

by

William Olszewski, Ph.D.

Darrol Bussler

Mankato State University
P.O. Box 8400
Mankato, MN 56002-8400

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## Learning to Serve —Serving to Learn

Teacher preparation programs in Minnesota universities and colleges are being encouraged to include service-learning in their curriculums. The College of Education at Mankato State University has begun a process to develop a means toward that end. This article provides a perspective on the framework being used and includes the definition, philosophical basis, need, potential, and brief summary of beginning steps.

***Definition***

The concept of service-learning has only recently been defined. Interest in service-learning in Minnesota began after 1987 when the Legislature passed Youth Development Plan Legislation which was to be implemented in Minnesota school districts through their community education departments. The legislation resulted in community education departments identifying a cross-section of community residents, including youth, and asking them to develop a vision of their communities in ten or twenty years. Following the vision process, discussions focused on how to develop and implement plans in moving toward the vision. With approved plans by local school boards, communities were eligible to receive funding to support beginning programs.

At the turn of the present decade, discussions in youth development included "youth service." Many participants in discussions became confused, a result of differing views about the relationship between youth, school, learning, community, service, and volunteering. A common issue in the discussions was whether service could be required. Adding to the confusion, newspapers reported courts requiring offenders to perform community service hours. In retrospect, the discussions with varied views of "service" were needed to attain a definition of service-learning.

In developing a definition of service-learning, it may be helpful to define related terms such as *volunteerism, community service,* and *service. Volunteerism* has a long history in American culture and may be defined as a freely chosen act of good will for which there is no monetary compensation. It may be done for an individual, for a group or for the community. In contrast, community service has varied meanings. Traditionally, community service has centered on the idea that it is a freely chosen act of good will, without monetary compensation, to aid the community; in that sense, it is a form of

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volunteerism, but the focus is definitely on community. Youth groups such as 4-H and scouts have long histories of community service projects.

Court references to community service carry a different meaning. In this case community service is a *required* act of good will in the community without monetary compensation.

References to "service" likewise carry differing meanings. There is military service which will usually provide compensation, but may or may not be of free will. Related to this conception of service is the present proposal for a national community service program in which participants would receive monetary-related compensation.

From the preceding discussion on *community service* and *service*, we can draw two conclusions: (1) service is an act of good will; (2) it may or may not be required. These two conclusions can be helpful in developing a definition of service-learning and drawing a distinction between volunteerism, community service, service, and service-learning.

The service component of service-learning is defined as above: an act of good will which may or may not be required. The latter distinguishes it from volunteerism, which is *always* an act of free will. The second component, learning, also distinguishes it from volunteerism as well as from community service, and service. Service-learning must provide a means to gain educational outcomes, or learning. In short, it differs in the nature of the compensation. Based on the preceding analysis, we propose the following definition: service-learning is an individual or group act of good will (service) for a person, group or community, based on planned educational outcomes (learning). Service-learning begins with learner outcomes and uses service as a means to attain the outcomes.

***Philosophical Base***

The service component of service-learning has multi-cultural roots. For example, service to others is a common value in American Indian cultures. Bernie Bearskin, a Winnebago Indian, states, "My earliest training in the home impressed me with the philosophy of our forebears. It was taught to us that if one could be of service to his people, this is one of the greatest honors there is" ( Bearskin, 1991, p. 2). A parallel is found in the Christian Tradition through references such as loving one's neighbor, exemplified in the story of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10, 29-37) in which a traveler provides service to a needy individual of a different class.

Philosophically, ideas of service-learning emerge in the Progressive Education Movement and, later, in the philosophy of reconstructionism. It may be noted that earlier writers provided a basis for such thought; for example, Comenius saw the need for life-like education, Rousseau for life-centered education, and Pestalozzi for firsthand experience (Olsen, 1975). It is the latter idea—experience—which became a basic tenet in John Dewey's philosophy and was instrumental in shifting education from being teacher-centered to being student-centered. But it must be noted that experience, in and of itself, was not viewed as necessarily producing learning. The result was Dewey's view that "education is the reconstruction of experience." This statement is the basis for the learning component in service-learning: the service experience must be mentally revisited, reconstructed in the mind of the learner in order for learning to occur. We now refer this as the process of critical reflection. A primary component of classwork connected with service-learning is an emphasis on individual and group reflective experiences. Ernest Boyer states that "[s]ervice is not just giving out, it is also gaining insights... [I]f students are to be educationally affected by service, they should be asked to comment on their experience and explore with a mentor and fellow students how the experience is related to what they have been studying in school" (in Parsons, 1991, p. 82).

Conrad and Hedin (1991) provide an historical review of "school-based community service" and suggest that arguments for the role of service in an educational program focus on such issues "—as a way to stimulate learning and social development, as a means of reforming society and preserving a democracy, and as an antidote to the separation of youth from a wider community" (p. 745). All of these arguments may find their philosophical foundations in reconstructionism. For example, George Counts' (1932)*Dare the School Build a New Social Order?* served as a major literary force in suggesting that the school could be a change agent of society. According to Theodore Brameld and other reconstructionists, the school is the key to social change, but only inasmuch as it reflects community desires and employs social democratic principles.

Reconstructionists contend that service-learning is one means to establishing a strong link between school and community. Harold Rugg (1931) in Culture *and Education in America* called for a school-centered community which he defined as "a society in which home, government, industries, trade,

farms, organizations, all the social agencies, will perceive their educational as well as their maintenance functions" (p. 289). Reconstructionists suggest that service-learning is a means for the entire community to recognize its educational responsibility and that service-learning be implemented through the process of social democracy. Service-learning promotes community-based schools and education-based communities.

***The Place of Service-Learning***

For the last quarter century university life has been tainted by a damaging force which has been rampant in society at large: individualism. Where individualism has found expression in society as greed, unmitigated *laissez faire* enterprise, self-centeredness and loss of a sense of the common good (which philosophers have spoken of for over two millennia), it has been expressed in the university as "...absolutized: Let faculty members teach what they want to teach, study anything they want, consult with anyone who pays them; let students learn what they want to learn, live anywhere they prefer, be responsible for no one but themselves" (Martin, 1977, p. 9). While the latter judgment may be more severe than many will allow, and while it reflects a criticism of the educational adventurism of the 1960s and 70s, its criticism of excessive individualism is still valid. (For a comprehensive treatment of individualism, see Bellah et al, 1985, *Habits of the Heart.: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*). Charges of isolationism should at least urge us to think of the role and function of the university in the lives not only of faculty and students but of society as well.

Within some segments of society, there have, of late, been significant departures from self-absorption and individualism. Ecological disaster, famine, human rights abuses and the plight of poorer nations have stimulated public concern and involvement. In the public school systems, cooperative learning, the movement toward ecological sensitivity and responsibility, team teaching and team building, and global and multi-cultural education have broadened philosophical vision and affected educational practice. We are learning, perhaps, that solipsism is not really a viable choice; only through cooperative effort can major earth-problems be solved. Even in private life, one's problems are no longer looked on as only self-generated. Increasingly, all difficulties are seen as systemic, as are all solutions.

The university, then, can no longer maintain a stance of sheer observation and analysis of social ills, aloof from participation. One of the functions of the university is to develop consciousness such that the student is equipped to render balanced and informed judgment about the events of life and the world and to make choices equally balanced and informed. This is a function far beyond career-building or skill training. Not to so equip the student is to fail in an essential mission. "...skill training removed from social purposes, and all the other forms that know-how training takes, is not good enough. It is necessary now to restore balance between professionalism and the liberating arts and sciences and, by bringing them together, to find ways to make practical education more humane and humane education more practical" (Martin, 1977, p. 7).

There is no educational enterprise which now can afford to be myopic about the problems of the larger world. Thinking itself can no longer afford to be exclusive, and action must now anticipate the full range of consequences, not just those for the agent. Education is not exempt from the responsibility to make practical contributions to social needs. Who denies, at this juncture, that education for social responsibility is not only a *good* but a *necessity* within the university? Who will proclaim in our day that education—public or private—is a movement of its own, cloistered and sequestered, only accountable for equipping its students with academic learning, not with a sense of the dangers and possibilities and necessities of life in the world and of the possibility of alleviating some of its pains?

The vision—or better, the consciousness—of the need for the involvement of the university *community* (as we call ourselves) in developing within students a sense both of social responsibility and of what is to be learned by contributing to society is still a goal and hope for the future. There is no community without concern for the other. To attain it, the university needs to provide both access and motivation so that students can participate in development of a level of consciousness appropriate to the current world in which they live. "Access" means (in traditional language) courses which students may take. "Motivation" within the university community has traditionally been provided by requirements—for General Education, for major or minor, for graduation.

Required course(s)—access and motivation—may seem a regressive approach to providing a forum for the development of a sense of social

education and responsibility. Yet they can be seen also as a statement of how the university views its essence, and of how it intends to fulfill its mission. Service-learning is one of many possible responses of higher education to community and world needs.

There is, of course, little evidence that service-learning is intrinsic to most institutions' mission statements (Gwynne, 1989). In fact, educational institutions have preempted the concept and view themselves as "service institutions", whose "service" is carried out through teaching, research, and the various student and campus services. At the same time, "academic excellence" is pitted against other endeavors such as service-learning, under the questionable assumption that each negates or diminishes the other. Is it not possible to add legitimate service to teaching and research, asks Alec Dickson, "...so that institutions can develop an extra dimension as resource centers of help to humanity"? (Dickson, 1982, p. 8.)

***Service-Learning's Inherent Potentials***

It must not be supposed that service-learning is learning unworthy of the university, learning which falls below the standards of any other part of university life. It is service and it is learning. The learning must be serious; it must be reflective and informed; it should be creative and research-enriched. It must have the character of "critical intelligence", as Susan Sontag (1976), among others, has observed. The academic imperative must be observed as surely as in any other college course. But successful participation should result in a change in both thinking and feeling. It must be as much a matter of the heart as of the head.

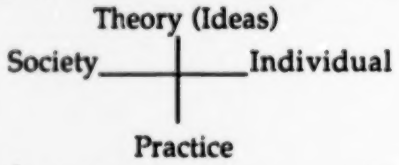
In a legitimate service-learning project, there will be ample opportunity for decision-making and for problem-solving, as well as for interpersonal skill building, critical thinking, cooperation, and identification of priorities and values. Many educational gurus presently suggest that these are the necessary skills for today's world—and tomorrow's.

There is a peculiarly sharp edge to the realities encountered in service-learning projects. The result can be a finer sense that the real world is largely made up of shades of gray, admits of fewer absolutes and is more resistant to generalization than is commonly believed, and that many needy people have multiple layers of both disadvantages and humanity. It may be one of the ironies of education that service-learning projects, specific in their focus and aims, are in fact better suited to achievement of the goals of General

Education than are many of the courses now taught (too often by graduate students with insufficient life experience) in that area. And those who have been involved in such service projects often report considerable impact on the formation of their personal philosophies of life as a result. Can education provide a more precious boon than this?

The idea of service-learning as an integral part of curriculum, is, as noted, Deweyan, although Dewey's idea is less insistently directed toward social contribution. The value of learning from experience was paramount in his mind, and so his focus was on the beneficial results for the learner rather than on benefits for society.

Sinclair Goodlad (1988) proposes a model for liberal college curricula:




Although there has been significant improvement in the relationship between theory and practice, with internships, clinical experiences, lab times, practicums, etc., in most if not all major areas, balance between the vertical and the horizontal axes is unequal. But these remain principally individual-centered, with scant attention paid to the overarching issues, problems and needs of society. Improvement of the individual's capacities and skills remains the central focus of our educational endeavor, to the neglect of the entire dimension of the individual's responsibilities and possibilities within a context larger than personal life.

Martin (1977, p. 3) raises the issue this way:

> Are the obligations of the academic profession and of institutions of higher education mainly academic and intellectual, abstract and theoretical, in the subject matter specializations, or are there also obligations of accountability to societal needs of a broader sort, often having to do...with training for citizenship and education for social responsibility? Do not the services of the institution need to be those that respond to societal needs, as perceived by the people rather than only by educators themselves?

How can we in higher education respond when asked (if ever it happens) what we do to attempt to stimulate larger visions and sensitivities, greater capacities for caring, empathy, compassion and reflection on the place of the individual within society? Or when asked how we address the problem of the formation of personal philosophies of life and work and human satisfaction?

Our response surely must come with a stammer, a hesitation, before falling back on generalities about classroom experiences in which the student is challenged to write a philosophy or to address a simulated problem. While it provides a legitimate reponse to that question, service-learning generally remains an add-on, unconnected to major requirements and not seen as pertinent, much less integral, to the mission of institution, college or department.

This is not to suggest that service-learning is either an educational or a civic panacea. Little may be learned of public policy and of how one wields influence in the halls of political power (Boyte, 1991). Yet there is every reason to believe that empathic qualities can be stimulated, concern for people enlarged, and feelings of participation and of making even a small difference generated (Gwynne, 1989).

Serious commitment to service-learning demands that it be regarded not as an add-on course, but as an integral part of institutional thinking. To demonstrate such commitment, Gwynne (1989) suggests criteria for service-learning courses that include integration with academic study, equal access to all, adopting a vision that service is integral to learning, and local, national and international venues for service-learning.

Higher education seems to be regarded with increasing disfavor, a sobering signal in our society. While such disaffection is often politically motivated and unfair in the extreme, the public could not so easily overlook service projects which appear as part of an institution's mandate, nor dismiss readily-documented accounts of service-learning projects. There is the potential for warmer and more understanding relationships between institution and community to spring from action-oriented and participatory endeavors where students and community members work side-by-side, with common understandings and goals. The long-standing tendency to see the university faculty as aloof, with heads in the clouds and impervious to the clamors of the world might be ameliorated in part by community action projects at, as Gwynne proposes, local, national and international sites.

***Beginning Steps***

The plans for integrating service-learning in the teacher education program at Mankato State University began over a year ago when a grant proposal was prepared by faculty in the Educational Foundations Department in the College of Education, faculty in the College of Social and Behavioral

Sciences, and staff in Student Development Programs and Activities. A $21,000 federal grant was awarded in September of 1992 through the Minnesota Higher Education Coordinating Board. The grant supports the development and implementation of service-learning classes to be offered during Spring Quarter, 1993, in Corrections, Sociology, and Education. Mankato State University and Augsburg College are the only two institutions of higher education receiving funds for developing programs in teacher preparation.

Since the fall of 1992, faculty who will be teaching the classes at Mankato State, along with staff from Student Programs and Activities, have met to plan content, structure, and procedures for classes in Spring Quarter. These meetings have included students and potential cooperating agencies in which students will serve.

The College of Education will involve approximately fifteen pre-service teachers in a four-credit course designed to achieve four basic objectives: Students (1) will serve 40-50 hours in an area community agency, (2) will make site visits to communities presently practicing service-learning in their schools, (3) will meet as a class for four hours weekly with planned activities including reflection, and (4) will begin to develop recommendations with faculty regarding integration of service-learning into the teacher preparation curriculum at Mankato State University. The ultimate goal is to prepare education graduates with attitudes, knowledge and skill to implement service-learning programs in K-12 classrooms and communities.

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